Resource Book

Sandinista Elections in Nicaragua

United States Department of State

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Summary

In 1978-79, the Nicaraguan people fought to defeat the Somoza dictatorship and bring democracy to their nation. The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), which led the military struggle, promised to the people and to the international community that it would promote a pluralistic system in which all sectors of the society could participate freely. Once in power, however, the Sandinistas quickly lost interest in elections, insisting that they were "the vanguard of the people" with a historic right to rule.

As the Sandinistas implemented their plans to develop a Marxist-Leninist state in Nicaragua, opposition to their regime mounted and the international image of their revolution diminished. The Sandinistas concluded that they could use elections as a mechanism to affirm the international legitimacy of the revolution. They anticipated that by persuading the world that their revolution was democratic and popular, they could obtain increased levels of economic aid from the West and intensify political pressure on those who supported groups opposed to the FSLN. However, the Sandinistas ensured that the electoral process could not result in a transfer of power. Acting under a State of Emergency which imposed strict censorship and stifled the activities of other parties, the FSLN enacted laws which guaranteed its control over every aspect of the electoral process.

The Sandinistas have scheduled elections for November 4, 1984. Seven parties have registered to run: the FSLN itself; three other Marxist parties; two parties of the democratic left, one of which is allied with the FSLN; and a faction of the conservative party which has benefited from FSLN assistance. The FSLN has exploited its control of the government (including the police and military), of the media, and of mass organizations to promote its own campaign while obstructing those of the other parties. The largest of the three registered non-Marxist parties withdrew from the elections in protest on October 21, and the others have indicated that they would consider similar action.

The mainline democratic opposition parties, allied in the Democratic Coordinating Board (Coordinadora), have refused to register under conditions that they believe do not permit a free and fair election. They repeatedly have called upon the Sandinistas to give the necessary guarantees so that they could compete, but the Sandinistas have rejected their proposals and have refused to negotiate seriously. Instead, Sandinista turbas (mobs) have repeatedly disrupted meetings of the Democratic Coordinating Board, frequently using violence.

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As the situation now stands, the parties representing Nicaragua's political spectrum from the center-left to the right will not be on the ballot. For many Nicaraguans, the Sandinista elections on November 4 will offer no choice at all. The promise of free elections the Sandinistas made to the Nicaraguan people and to the world before they seized power will remain unfulfilled.

The United States Government has consistently been a proponent of the democratic process in Nicaragua, as elsewhere in Central America. The U.S. Government supports the demands of the opposition parties that the elections be free and fair, and it sympathizes with their decision not to participate unless the Sandinistas offer the necessary guarantees.

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SANDINISTA ELECTIONS IN NICARAGUA

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Introduction

In 1978-79, the Nicaraguan people waged a heroic struggle to defeat the Somoza dictatorship and bring democracy to Nicaragua. The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), which led the military campaign against Somoza's forces, pledged repeatedly that it would support the development of a pluralistic democracy.

On November 4, 1984, Nicaragua is scheduled to hold a national election, and the FSLN has hailed it as the first free election in the nation's history. In fact, the electoral process is seriously flawed since the Sandinistas have exploited their control of the state, the media, and mass organizations to ensure their victory at the polls.

Several parties which represent the mainstream of the democratic opposition have decided not to participate in the election process because they believe that the current conditions make a meaningful election impossible. Their attempts to negotiate fair electoral rules were rebuffed by the Sandinistas. Other parties have opted to run, only to see their campaigns obstructed by the FSLN. One of these parties has already withdrawn in protest. Under these circumstances, the November 4 election will not allow the Nicaraguan people to freely express their will, and the Sandinistas' elections will differ little from the elections conducted by the Somoza regime.

Background to the Election

During the fighting to oust Somoza, the Sandinistas vowed that they would promote a pluralistic system in which all sectors of Nicaragua's society would be able to participate freely in a new government. Shortly before seizing power, the FSLN communicated to the Organization of American States its assurance that it would hold free elections for representatives to city councils and to a constituent assembly, and that later elections would be held for national leaders. This commitment was codified a week later in the Fundamental Statute, the interim constitution for the new Government of National Reconstruction (GRN).

The Sandinistas quickly lost interest in holding elections, however. They argued that since they clearly enjoyed popular support, it made no sense to waste on an election scarce resources needed for reconstruction. During the following year, many Nicaraguans who had collaborated with the Sandinistas became alarmed by the leftist drift of the revolution and began to question whether the Sandinistas ever intended to honor their commitment to democracy. When the first anniversary of the revolution passed with no mention of an electoral timetable, many opposition leaders began to clamor

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for a definite schedule and to remind the Sandinistas of their oft-repeated pledge to hold early elections. Annoyed by this agitation, the Sandinistas decided to put an end to talk about elections. In August 1980, Defense Minister Humberto Ortega, one of the nine comandantes in the FSLN's National Directorate, proclaimed that the Sandinistas had decided that elections would not be held until 1985, and that no electoral activity of any type would be allowed until 1984.

Sandinista Perceptions of Democracy

The announcement that the elections were being postponed for five more years stunned many who had hoped for an early date. For others, however, this decision was predictable, and it merely reflected an aversion to Western-style democracy which was rooted deeply in Sandinista ideology.

The FSLN adheres to the Marxist interpretation of history: it perceives the world as progressing from its capitalist stage--where the bourgeoisie dominate the political and economic system and exploit the proletariat--to a more advanced socialist stage in which the proletariat, "the people," exercise power. The Sandinistas perceive themselves as the vanguard of "the people" in this irreversible process of social transformation, and thus they insist that they have a historic right to rule. From their ideological perspective, elections are superfluous, since logically it would be impossible for "the people" (defined as those whose political consciousness has been raised by revolutionary political education) to choose any leadership other than their own vanguard, the FSLN.

Sandinista leaders have consistently disparaged "bourgeois democracy" such as that practiced in the United States and Western Europe; instead, they espouse the concept of "participatory democracy" in which people become involved at the local level in making decisions on issues that directly affect their lives and their community.

Given their aversion to elections, it is surprising that the Sandinistas decided to have elections at all. In a closed meeting in the spring of 1984 with the leadership of the Nicaraguan Socialist Party (a small Moscow-line Communist party allied with the FSLN), Comandante Bayardo Arce, a member of the FSLN's National Directorate and the head of the FSLN's Political Commission, candidly revealed the Sandinistas' motives for holding elections.

Arce recalled that in June 1979, the Organization of American States was discussing a U.S. proposal to send a peacekeeping force to Nicaragua. The FSLN, anxious to forestall any intervention that could lead to a negotiated peace and thus prevent the revolution from achieving total victory, proclaimed a program of national reconstruction based on three elements: nonalignment, a mixed economy, and

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political pluralism. With this program, Arce explained, the Sandinistas succeeded in galvanizing international support and blocking foreign intervention. He then remarked that the FSLN disliked this commitment to an electoral process, but had felt that it was necessary at the time. He explained that what a revolution needs is not elections but the power to act; power is the essence of the dictatorship of the proletariat, he insisted.

Arce stressed that were it not for the military pressure placed on Nicaragua by the U.S., elections would be a total nuisance. He explained that the realities of Nicaragua's situation compelled the FSLN to use elections as an instrument to disarm the international bourgeoisie. Arce assured his Marxist compatriots that the elections held by the FSLN would serve to facilitate the establishment of socialism in Nicaragua.

The Sandinistas perceive elections as a mechanism for reaffirming the international legitimacy of their regime. At a time when they are suffering a grave economic crisis and confronting mounting armed resistance, their efforts to build a Marxist-Leninist state have led to diminished economic and political support from the West. The Sandinistas have concluded that elections could be the key to persuading the international community that the Sandinista revolution was indeed popular and democratic. The Sandinistas calculated that if they restored their image, they could obtain millions of dollars of new economic aid as well as intensify political pressure on those who have supported the armed opposition groups.

In calling for an election, however, the comandantes made clear that the process could not result in a transfer of power. Defense Minister Humberto Ortega stressed that the elections would serve only to strengthen the FSLN, and that power would not be "raffled off" as in some lottery. Planning Minister Henry Ruiz, also a member of the FSLN's National Directorate, reiterated that the purpose of the election was to confirm the leadership of the FSLN, and he explained that the people had a right to pluralism, but with Sandinista hegemony. Junta Coordinator Daniel Ortega Saavedra, also a member of the FSLN's National Directorate, vowed that "neither bullets nor ballots" would ever push the FSLN from power.

Laws Governing the Electoral Process

In March 1982, the Sandinistas decreed a State of Emergency which severely curtailed the civil and political rights of the Nicaraguan people. In October of that year, the Sandinistas and their allies unveiled a six-point program to institutionalize the revolution which included plans for a Political Parties Law and an Electoral Law. The three laws

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have established the climate and defined the rules under which the elections will take place.

The State of Emergency suspended many of the rights of Nicaraguans specifically guaranteed by the GRN shortly after it assumed power. Under the State of Emergency, the Sandinistas imposed strict censorship of the media and stifled the activities of all other political parties.

The Political Parties Law, enacted in September 1983, established the rules governing the existence and functioning of political parties. It created two bodies, the National Assembly of Political Parties and the National Council of Political Parties, to oversee the activities of parties, and it required all parties to be anti-imperialist and to support the revolution in order to obtain legal standing. During the debate of the law in the quasi-legislative Council of State, the opposition parties walked out in protest. They objected to the way in which the FSLN-dominated Council was shaping the law to ensure complete Sandinista control of the enforcement apparatus. They stressed that the law gave the Sandinistas life-or-death power over all other parties.

In February 1984, the FSLN introduced the Electoral Law to the Council of State. This law, as finally decreed in March and amended in July, established the rules under which the election would be held. While preparing the Electoral Law, the Sandinistas amended the Fundamental Statute to provide for the election of a president, a vice president, and 90 members of a National Assembly. The Electoral Law then defined the process by which these officials would be elected. It established election machinery headed by the Supreme Electoral Council to administer the entire process. The Electoral Law covered a broad range of issues including voter and candidate eligibility, registration and voting procedures, campaign activities including access to the media and campaign ethics, and state financing. (See appendix for details of the Electoral Law.)

Once again, the democratic opposition walked out in protest during the Council of State's debate of the law. They complained that the FSLN's revision of the Fundamental Statute to provide for presidential elections violated the pact made in 1979 among all sectors that had participated in the revolution to hold elections for local offices and a constituent assembly first and only later elect national leaders. They insisted that the amendment constituted a flagrant move by the Sandinistas to consolidate their power still further, since the practical result would be official sanction of FSLN domination of both the executive and legislative branches of government until at least 1991. The opposition pointed out that the decision to elect a president whose authority was not defined usurped the prerogative of the constituent assembly to determine if Nicaragua was even to have a presidential system.

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The opposition also protested that the Electoral Law was biased in favor of the FSLN, pointing to such areas as the mechanism for selection of the members of the Supreme Electoral Council, ensuring Sandinista control; the lowering of the voting age to 16, enfranchising more than 100,000 youths who have been indoctrinated in the Sandinista-controlled education system; and strictly limiting the length of the campaign and media exposure, affording opposition parties minimal time to get their message out to the Nicaraguan people.

While the Electoral Law was before the Council of State, Junta Coordinator Daniel Ortega proclaimed on February 21 that the date of the elections was being advanced from an undetermined date in 1985 to November 4, 1984. He also decreed that the officials elected on that date would take office on January 10, 1985. This decision to set an election date in 1984 had been prompted by mounting pressure for early elections from Western Europe and Latin America.

Sandinista Domination of the Electoral Campaign

The Sandinistas hail the Electoral Law as the basis for the first free elections in Nicaragua's history. In fact, however, the Sandinistas have exploited their power to such an extent that the elections as now planned will have no more validity than those held by Somoza.

Shortly after the Electoral Law was decreed in late March, the Supreme Electoral Council was convened. As opposition leaders had feared, it was staffed entirely by members of the FSLN or Sandinista sympathizers. The Supreme Electoral Council originally proposed scheduling a two-month campaign, the minimum allowed by the Electoral Law. Following the outcry that two months was inadequate by all the parties except the FSLN, the Supreme Electoral Council announced on May 24 that the campaign would be of three months duration. At the same time, it established a two-month period for candidate registration, May 25-July 25, and a four-day period for voter registration, July 27-30.

During June and July, Nicaragua's political parties held conventions and meetings to select their candidates. All the non-FSLN parties delayed registering their candidates, awaiting the July 19 celebration of the fifth anniversary of the revolution when the State of Emergency was due to elapse. To the disappointment of these parties, Daniel Ortega announced that the State of Emergency was being extended and that only certain modifications would be made to facilitate the electoral process.

On July 23, just two days before the close of the registration period, the FSLN became the first party to submit its list of candidates. Six other parties filed their lists with the Supreme Electoral Council by the July 25 deadline:

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-- Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN): A Moscow-line Communist party with probably fewer than 1,000 members. Allied with the FSLN since 1980 in the Patriotic Front of the Revolution, it is broadly supportive of Sandinista programs although it has disagreed with the implementation of some policies.

-- Communist Party of Nicaragua (PCDEN): A hard-line Communist party with perhaps a few hundred members. It was founded by radicals who bolted from the PSN claiming that the PSN's leaders were not sufficiently revolutionary. It has criticized the FSLN for not moving fast enough to turn Nicaragua into a Marxist-Leninist state.

-- Popular Action Movement--Marxist/Leninist (MAP-ML): An ultra-left Communist party so small that it could not name candidates for all 90 seats to the National Assembly. It also has criticized the FSLN for moving too slowly toward communism.

-- Popular Social Christian Party (PPSC): A leftist democratic party with perhaps a few hundred members. It was founded in the 1970s by dissidents from the left wing of the Social Christian Party, and since 1980 has been allied with the FSLN in the Patriotic Front of the Revolution. It supports the goals of the revolution but is uneasy with the FSLN's drive toward a militarized Marxist state.

-- Independent Liberal Party (PLI): A leftist democratic party claiming 6,000 members, PLI was allied with the FSLN in the Patriotic Front of the Revolution from 1980 until February 1984 when it withdrew to prepare for the elections. Since that time, it has become increasingly critical of the FSLN. (On October 21, PLI announced that it was withdrawing from the campaign because the existing conditions made a fair election impossible.)

-- Democratic Conservative Party (PCD): One faction of what traditionally was Nicaragua's largest opposition party. In late 1983, a dispute arose among the leadership of the PCD, and the FSLN-controlled National Council of Political Parties instated one of the factions as the PCD's legal leadership. Many PCD members quickly abandoned the party and organized the new Nicaraguan Conservative Party. The PCD has been critical of the Sandinistas, but it has benefited from official favoritism. For example, the leaders of the PCD were embarrassed when more than a dozen of the party's candidates for the National Assembly declared that they had never agreed to appear on the PCD's ticket and petitioned to have their names removed. The Supreme Electoral Council decided to favor the PCD's leaders and ruled that the names would remain on the

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ballot, irrespective of the wishes of the candidates themselves.

The Democratic Coordinating Board (Coordinadora)--composed of the Social Christian (PSC), Social Democratic (PSD), and Liberal Constitutionalist (PLC) parties; two independent labor confederations; and various private sector and professional organizations; and supported by the PCD faction reorganized as the Nicaraguan Conservative Party--refused to register, claiming that the conditions necessary for free elections did not exist.

Control over the media exemplifies the advantages the Sandinistas enjoy over their opponents. Nicaragua's only television system, two of its three newspapers, and many of its radio stations are run directly by the FSLN. The Sandinistas have used the State of Emergency imposed in 1982 to muzzle the independent daily La Prensa and all non-Sandinista radio stations. For more than two years, they have censored thousands of La Prensa reports on the activities of non-FSLN parties and articles which reflected unfavorably on the FSLN. Frequently, La Prensa failed to publish because 80-90% of the day's hard news was censored by the government and the paper did not have sufficient material to fill out its pages (the Sandinistas do not permit La Prensa to leave blank spaces). As the controversy between the Sandinistas and the Catholic Church intensified, the government even banned the broadcast of live Masses over the Church's radio station. Throughout this period, the Sandinistas bombarded Nicaraguans with revolutionary propaganda via television, radio, and the press. Concurrently, bookstores were inundated with material from Cuba and the Soviet bloc, while literature from Western sources dried up.

In response to external pressure and the unanimous demand of all the other political parties, the government announced on July 19 that it would ease censorship. While La Prensa subsequently was able to publish many articles which previously would have been forbidden, the government still required prior censorship of all articles and continued to cut several articles every day. When La Prensa reported on demonstrations against forced conscription into the Sandinista Army in the northern town of Chinandega, the Sandinistas confiscated the entire La Prensa allotment to the region. Government censorship of numerous articles concerning the PLI's decision to withdraw from the campaign forced La Prensa not to publish on October 22.

The Sandinistas' abuse of the state-run television system shows how they have exploited their control of the government to benefit the FSLN as a party. Under the Electoral Law, all parties are entitled to equal time on television. The Sandinistas originally proposed that all parties share one hour of air time per week during the campaign; under this formula,

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each of the 10 eligible parties would have been allowed less than one minute of television time per day. Reluctantly, the Sandinistas acceded to the unified demand by all other parties for additional time; the Electoral Law as amended allows each participating party roughly 4-1/2 minutes of air time per day. While an improvement, this concession does not begin to balance the FSLN's access via its highly politicized daily news broadcast (the only news program in the country), as well as numerous special "documentaries" and other "public interest" telecasts prepared by the government.

Television coverage of the various parties' nominations of their candidates illustrates how the Sandinistas have manipulated this system. The non-FSLN parties were mentioned on television only briefly, if at all, and then usually in derogatory terms. In contrast, the Sandinista Television System broadcast live the entire two-hour session of the Sandinista Assembly on July 17 when the FSLN's candidates were named. Interior Minister Tomas Borge, one of the nine members of the National Directorate, delivered the keynote speech, ignoring Article 63 of the Electoral Law which expressly forbids members of the Sandinista Armed Forces on active duty from engaging in political proselytization. Rene Nunez, Secretary of the National Directorate, then read the names of the FSLN's presidential and vice-presidential candidates and those of each of the 90 candidates to the National Assembly and their alternates. Presidential candidate Daniel Ortega then made a lengthy speech describing the FSLN's platform. In this one program, the Sandinistas used as much air time as the other participating parties were allowed in the entire first month of the campaign. Since technically the campaign had not yet commenced, this television time was not even charged against the Sandinistas' allotment.

The six non-FSLN parties have encountered great obstacles in their efforts to campaign against the FSLN. Although they received state-financing under the Electoral Law, they have found it extremely difficult to purchase even minimal supplies of needed campaign materials such as paper, ink, and paint. The mobility of the parties has been restricted by the GRN's gasoline ration system which allocates only 20 gallons per vehicle per month. In contrast, the FSLN suffers no shortage of campaign materials and has blanketed whole neighborhoods with flashy billboards, swaths of red and black paint (the FSLN party colors), and Sandinista leaflets. Government trucks transport party activists, oblivious to the gas rationing. While the registered parties have been hard pressed to obtain even the most basic campaign materials, the FSLN has adorned the major streets of Managua with lighted revolving signboards.

A more serious problem for the registered parties has been harassment of their activists and interference with their campaign activities. The Sandinista army, police, and security forces have frequently detained members of these parties for

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performing routine campaign activities that are specifically authorized by the Electoral Law. The Sandinista military has drafted the leadership of the local youth chapters of these parties. The Sandinista Defense Committees (CDS), which exercise the quasi-governmental function of issuing ration cards, have denied ration cards to non-FSLN party activists. The CDS and other Sandinista mass organizations have harassed and intimidated the members of these parties and even resorted to physical violence.

Independent Liberal Party (PLI) candidate Virgilio Godoy protested to the Supreme Electoral Council that on the very first day of the campaign, August 1, the Sandinista military detained 15 youths for distributing PLI propaganda. Godoy noted that his party's Secretary General for the Matagalpa Department had been violently taken from his home on July 27 simply for having hired a car with loud speakers to urge citizens to register to vote. Elsewhere, Sandinista authorities interrogated two PLI leaders and confiscated their campaign materials. Godoy charged on August 7 that PLI activists in Esteli, Malpaisillo, Nagarote, Jinotega, and Leon had been victims of attacks by members of the Sandinista army and that there had been a systematic destruction of campaign materials which the party had obtained with great difficulty. In September, PLI again protested to the Supreme Electoral Council the way the electoral process was being carried out, noting both the failure of the government to make sufficient campaign supplies available and the Supreme Electoral Council's failure to prevent FSLN activists from committing campaign abuses. The PLI charged that government-run radio stations were violating the Electoral Law by refusing to carry PLI advertisements and accused the FSLN of using its control of the Armed Forces and educational institutions to intimidate and indoctrinate the Nicaraguan people.

The Democratic Conservative Party (PCD) has encountered similar problems and has been equally critical of the electoral process. In a letter to the Supreme Electoral Council, the PCD charged that the FSLN usurped government goods and supplies for its political purposes and that it was denying the opposition proper access to the media. Later that month, the Coordinator of the PCD threatened that the party would pull out of the election unless 150 of his party's activists were freed from detention: those listed included the president and national secretary of the PCD youth, two members of the PCD's National Executive Council, and various PCD farm worker leaders. (Subsequently, the government did release some 25 PCD activists.) On October 7, a Sandinista turba (mob) armed with sticks, chains, and rocks broke up the ceremonies marking the opening of the PCD's headquarters in Jinotepe, wounding several party members and destroying the party's rented bus. The party Coordinator charged that vehicles belonging to the government and the FSLN ferried the turba to the PCD's headquarters. While some Sandinista leaders urged their supporters not to

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resort to violence, the FSLN official organ Barricada printed an editorial by Onofre Guevara, an FSLN delegate to the Council of State, justifying the turba's actions; Guevara asserted that the registered parties had provoked this violent reaction by offending the political dignity of the Nicaraguan people with their claims that they offered a genuine alternative to the revolution.

The Popular Social Christian Party (PPSC), technically an ally of the FSLN, also has been critical of the Sandinistas. In a declaration published August 7, the PPSC declared that it had "not found any sign on the part of the ruling party or its organizations that they meant to honor in practice the guarantees they have offered." The PPSC condemned the FSLN's exploitation of its control of the media for its own benefit. The declaration stated that "repressive organisms of the state" had begun to send "shock forces" out to interfere with the campaign process and added that PPSC activists in Matagalpa had been directly threatened by members of the government's State Security apparatus.

The Marxist parties running in the election have fared little better. The Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN), the FSLN's closest ally, protested in August that party members had had their ration cards revoked by the local Sandinista Defense Committee (CDS) because of their involvement in the political campaign and that four PSN activists had been arrested by Sandinista authorities for distributing campaign materials. The Popular Action Movement--Marxist/Leninist also sent a letter to the Supreme Electoral Council in August protesting Sandinista interference with its campaign activities.

The registered parties have attempted to work together in order to offset the FSLN's dominant position. In early August, a PSN leader disclosed that his party had joined PLI, PPSC, PCD, and the PCDEN in signing a letter to the FSLN which insisted that the minimal conditions for free elections did not exist in Nicaragua and appealed for the lifting of the State of Emergency and the reinstatement of civil liberties. The six parties repeatedly met as a group with the FSLN seeking to resolve problems concerning the acquisition of campaign materials and to curb FSLN abuses, but each time the talks broke down when the Sandinistas refused to take corrective action.

As the election date neared, several parties faced the hard choice of continuing to participate in an electoral process which was seriously flawed or pulling out of the campaign. Accordingly, they appealed for a "national summit" meeting of political parties in which the conduct of the electoral process would be a central issue. The first of these meetings was held on October 9, but the Sandinistas steered the discussions away from campaign issues toward the nature of the post-election political environment. Many of the registered

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parties interpreted this as a transparent attempt to keep them in the elections while doing nothing to address their concerns. On October 20, the Sandinistas announced that at a "national summit" meeting on the same day, a comprehensive agreement had been reached. The following day, however, the PLI decided to withdraw completely from the November 4 election. Other registered parties are considering following the PLI's lead.

The Democratic Center

The four political parties that represent Nicaragua's political spectrum from the center-left to the right are not participating in the Sandinistas' elections. Three of these parties, the Social Christians (PSC), the Social Democrats (PSD), and the Liberal Constitutionalists (PLC), belong to the Nicaraguan Democratic Coordinating Board "Ramiro Sacasa Guerrero" (Coordinadora). Also members of the Democratic Coordinating Board are two independent labor confederations and six private sector organizations of businessmen, merchants, farmers, ranchers, and professionals. The Nicaraguan Conservative Party, the restructured mainline faction of the Democratic Conservative Party, works closely with the Democratic Coordinating Board although it is not formally a member.

The parties of the Democratic Coordinating Board differ widely in their political orientation, but they share a common belief in the democratic system and have consistently advocated free and fair elections. On December 24, the Democratic Coordinating Board issued a document entitled "A Step Toward Democracy: Free Elections" which called for elections and listed nine points essential for meaningful elections:

-- Separation of state and party;

-- Repeal of laws that violate human rights;

-- Suspension of the State of Emergency;

-- Promulgation of an amnesty law;

-- Respect for freedom of worship;

-- Respect for freedom of organized labor;

-- Autonomy of the judicial branch;

-- Reinstatement of habeas corpus;

-- A National Dialogue on elections with participation by all sectors, including the armed opposition.

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Throughout 1984, the parties of the Democratic Coordinating Board reiterated their desire to participate in fair and honest elections, but they declared that until these nine points were addressed, the conditions for honest elections simply did not exist. In February, they participated in the initial Council of State debate on the Electoral Law and then withdrew when the Sandinista-dominated body repeatedly rejected their proposals. The Democratic Coordinating Board stressed that the State of Emergency with its censorship and restrictions on political activity precluded the possibility of an open campaign. Like the other parties, they waited anxiously for the State of Emergency to elapse and were disappointed when Daniel Ortega announced on July 19 that it was being extended throughout the campaign period.

On July 20, the Democratic Coordinating Board announced that it would nominate Arturo Cruz as its presidential candidate. Cruz had been one of "Los Doce," a group of 12 prominent Nicaraguans whose open opposition helped to undermine Somoza's regime. Following the revolution, he had served as President of the Central Bank, a member of the Junta, and finally as Nicaraguan Ambassador to the United States. Disillusioned by the Sandinistas failure to remain nonaligned and to promote a pluralistic society, Cruz resigned his government post and later participated in the Rescate (rescue) effort to restore the revolution to its original democratic course. In announcing Cruz's candidacy, the Democratic Coordinating Board emphasized that it would not register with the Supreme Electoral Council until the proper conditions for free elections existed.

On July 23, Cruz returned to Nicaragua after more than two years in exile. At a news conference the following day, Cruz voiced his support for the Democratic Coordinating Board's nine points and announced that the leaders of the three armed opposition groups had informed him that if the Sandinistas were prepared to create the conditions for free elections, they would lay down their arms. On July 25, the final day of the candidate registration period, the Democratic Coordinating Board requested an extension of the deadline to allow additional time for conditions to improve and leave the door open to elections in which all parties could compete fairly.

Daniel Ortega flatly rejected Cruz's proposals as unacceptable. Ortega vowed that the FSLN would never agree to a dialogue that included the armed opposition. Bayardo Arce announced that at a meeting of all of Nicaragua's political parties on July 25, he had stated that the FSLN was willing to lift the State of Emergency, but only if all the parties signed a declaration to the United States Government and the United States Congress expressing a desire for free elections and demanding an end to aggression and the withdrawal of counterrevolutionary forces from their external sanctuaries. Arce downplayed the significance of the Democratic Coordinating

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Board's refusal to register Cruz. He added that the Democratic Coordinating Board could still participate in the election if it entered into an alliance with one of the registered parties by the August 4 deadline for the formation of coalitions.

On August 2, the President of the National Council of Political Parties, Hugo Mejia, proclaimed that parties that had not registered their candidates, i.e. the Democratic Coordinating Board, were barred from engaging in campaign activities. He warned that if they had not entered into an alliance by August 4, they would lose all their rights under the Political Parties Law, and they would forfeit their seats in the Council of State and in the National Assembly of Political Parties. On August 4, the Supreme Electoral Council extended by one day the period for the formation of alliances.

The Democratic Coordinating Board concluded that the conditions that had led it not to register on July 25 were unchanged. Rather than try to form an alliance with a registered party, it decided to take its message to the people outside the capital. On August 4, Cruz presided over a rally at a movie theater in Matagalpa. A Sandinista turba harassed those attending the rally, chanting threats and throwing stones, but Cruz's supporters held their ground. (Democratic Coordinating Board members later disclosed that some who attended the meeting subsequently were denied ration cards by the Sandinista Defense Committees.) The following day, Cruz held a much larger rally at a baseball stadium in Chinandega. Once again, a Sandinista turba attempted to disrupt the proceedings, but the crowd of 7,000-10,000 drove them away. On August 6, Junta member and FSLN vice-presidential candidate Sergio Ramirez denounced Cruz's two rallies as illegal "aggressive acts" that would not be tolerated. Daniel Ortega labeled Cruz "an emissary of the counterrevolution and of imperialism" and rejected Cruz's proposal for a debate.

On August 7, Interior Minister Tomas Borge, a member of the FSLN National Directorate, summoned several leaders of the Democratic Coordinating Board to his Managua office. Borge informed them that the Sandinistas were willing to reach an understanding and that, although the registration period had passed, the FSLN could arrange to have it reopened. Borge assured the opposition leaders that they would be treated like any other party and warned that the consequences of abstention would be political limbo. Two days later, the Democratic Coordinating Board responded in a communique reconfirming that the requisite conditions for free elections still did not exist. The communique added that one of the "nine points," that calling for a national dialogue, might be achieved in stages, and that the Democratic Coordinating Board had formed a committee to study the steps that could lead to such on exchange.

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In early August, the leaders of the armed opposition groups publicly declared that they would not insist on participating in a national dialogue. On August 15, the Democratic Coordinating Board directed a letter to Daniel Ortega noting that the armed opposition's voluntary withdrawal removed the FSLN's objection to a national dialogue and asking when such talks might begin.

One week later, the National Council of Political Parties formally stripped the three political parties in the Democratic Coordinating Board--the PSC, the PSD, and the PLC--of their legal standing. Council President Mejia declared that these "groups" no longer had the right to hold public meetings or issue public statements in connection with the electoral process. Mejia said that the parties would be allowed to retain their property and their seats on the Council of State.

With the Democratic Coordinating Board's efforts to achieve the conditions for a free election stymied, Cruz went abroad to solicit assistance in breaking the deadlock. In late August and early September, Cruz met with Costa Rican President Luis Alberto Monge, Venezuelan President Jaime Lusinchi, Colombian President Belisario Betancur, and Ecuadorean President Leon Febres-Cordero as well as many other Latin political leaders. President Betancur in particular assumed an active role in attempting to facilitae negotiations between the Sandinistas and Cruz. During these discussions, Cruz redefined the Democratic Coordinating Board's position and listed six essential points:

-- full freedom of the press;

-- full freedom to hold meetings and rallies;

-- full access to voter registration lists and election returns;

-- international observation of the elections;

-- security of voting places and ability to campaign in military bases;

-- postponement of the elections to allow at least 90 days for campaigning.

On September 13, Cruz returned to Nicaragua. The Democratic Coordinating Board leaders planned a large reception, but protested that the Sandinista authorities in several towns prevented busloads of Cruz supporters from traveling to the airport. At a press conference later that day, Cruz expressed his gratification for having been received at so high a level everywhere he went, and he stressed that the Democratic Coordinating Board's position was unchanged: it fervently desired to participate in free and open elections,

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but it would not register until the Sandinistas created the conditions necessary for free elections. Two days later, Council of State President Carlos Nunez, one of the members of the FSLN National Directorate, responded by proclaiming that the FSLN would not accept a dialogue, nor would it discuss even one of the Democratic Coordinating Board's points.

Cruz resumed his trips to the interior on September 19, starting with a meeting with 150 political leaders in Leon. A turba composed of hundreds of members of the Sandinista Youth--19th of July descended on the meeting site, beating drums and chanting Sandinista slogans. For two hours, the turba blocked the entrance to the building, threatening those inside. When Cruz and his followers attempted to leave, the Sandinistas pelted them with stones. Cruz himself sustained a head wound. The official version of the incident, as reported in an Interior Ministry communique, claimed that the violence was a result of provocations by Cruz and his supporters.

On September 21, Cruz held a meeting in Boaco and was again attacked by a turba. As Cruz attempted to leave the restaurant where the meeting was being held, the turba stoned his car, breaking the windows. The Sandinista Police were present throughout the incident, but they failed to provide Cruz adequate protection.

That same day, the FSLN issued a communique stating that it would ask the National Council of Political Parties to formally request the Supreme Electoral Council to reopen the candidate registration period until September 30. Cruz attributed this sudden flexibility to the efforts of Colombian President Betancur. Cruz stressed that since the election date was only a few weeks off, the Democratic Coordinating Board would require that the election be postponed so that it could have at least three months to mount its campaign. The FSLN immediately rejected any possibility of postponing the elections.

The next morning, September 22, Cruz attempted to hold a meeting in Masaya. Hundreds of members of the Sandinista Youth and the Sandinista Defense Committees (CDS) armed with sticks and metal pipes marched through the streets near the meeting site, accompanied by a jeep with sound equipment. The Sandinistas' chants drowned out Cruz's speech, and turba members began hurling stones at the building where the meeting was taking place. Ultimately, the Interior Ministry was called on to evacuate some of Cruz's supporters from the area. As Cruz attempted to leave, the turba stoned the car in which he was riding, smashing the windows and inflicting considerable damage. Once again, the Sandinistas blamed the violence on provocative acts by Cruz.

Three days after the clash in Masaya, the Supreme Electoral Council authorized a new candidate registration

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period of September 25 - October 1. The following day, the Supreme Court ruled that the National Council of Political Parties' decision to strip the parties of the Democratic Coordinating Board of their legal standing had been rendered null and void by the Supreme Electoral Council's action. These decisions made it again legally possible for the opposition parties to register. The Democratic Coordinating Board reiterated that it would not register "out of desperation or anxiety" and would only file its candidates once the conditions necessary for free elections were established. Daniel Ortega retorted that the Democratic Coordinating Board was "the political arm of the counterrevolution" and that its actions were "part of the policy of military aggression against Nicaragua." Ortega categorically refused to consider any delay of the elections.

During the Rio de Janeiro meeting of the Socialist International at the beginning of October, Cruz met with Bayardo Arce in yet another effort to reach an agreement. Arce said that the government would agree to the Democratic Coordinating Board's six demands if it would register for the election and then call on the armed opposition groups to agree to a cease fire If the armed opposition groups complied, the FSLN would postpone elections until January 13. If peace were not restored by October 25, the Democratic Coordinating Board could withdraw from the electoral process. Cruz accepted these terms, subject to the approval of the full Democratic Coordinating Board in Managua. At this point, however, Arce broke off the negotiations and publicly rejected any further discussion; he insisted that the elections would take place as scheduled on November 4. When Cruz returned to Managua on October 12, the Democratic Coordinating Board released a communique clarifying that all of its component organizations were prepared to accept the agreement which had been outlined in Rio de Janeiro.

Conclusion

If, as now seems likely, the parties representing Nicaragua's political spectrum from the center-left to the right are not on the ballot, it will be because, despite their strong and sincere efforts, they could not obtain the conditions that would allow a genuinely free and competitive election. The most significant of the non-Marxist parties which registered to run in the election, the PLI, has withdrawn for precisely the same reason. On November 4, Nicaraguan voters will have to make their choice among: the FSLN; three Communist parties of different shadings (the PSN, PCDEN, and the MAP-ML); a party of the democratic left which is allied with the FSLN (the PPSC); and a conservative party faction (PCD) which has benefited from FSLN favoritism. By election day, even this list may have become shorter if additional parties pull out. For many Nicaraguans, the Sandinista elections will offer no real choice at all. On November 4, the

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promise of a free election which the Sandinistas made to the Nicaraguan people and the world before they seized power will remain unfulfilled.

The United States Government has consistently been a proponent of the democratic process in Nicaragua, as elsewhere in Central America. The U.S. Government supports the demands of the opposition parties that the elections be free and fair, and it sympathizes with their decision not to participate unless the Sandinistas offer the necessary guarantees.

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FACTSHEET ON THE NICARAGUAN ELECTIONS

Date of Election: November 4, 1984

Officials to be Elected: A President, a Vice President, and 90 members of a National Assembly and their alternates.

Electoral System: The President and Vice President will be elected by plurality in a nation wide contest. The members of the National Assembly will be elected by regions using a proportional representation system.

Voter Eligibility: Universal suffrage is granted to all Nicaraguan citizens ages 16 and over. Convicted felons, former officers of Somoza's National Guard who have not been tried by the revolutionary government, and leaders of the armed opposition are specifically disenfranchised. During the voter registration period July 27-30, some 1,560,588 Nicaraguans reportedly registered, representing roughly 93.7% of the eligible population.

Electoral Machinery: A five-member Supreme Electoral Council oversees the entire electoral process. Officially, it is an autonomous body regarded as a fourth branch of government. Each of nine regions has an Electoral Council, and each region is subdivided into Zonal Electoral Boards. A total of 4,632 ballot receiving boards have been established; they performed the voter registration in July and will conduct the actual voting in November.

Parties Registered: Seven parties registered during the official registration period May 25-July 25:

-- Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN)
  Presidential Candidate: Comandante Daniel ORTEGA Saavedra
  Vice Presidential Candidate: Sergio RAMIREZ Mercado.

-- Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN)
  Presidential Candidate: Domingo Antonio SANCHEZ Salgado
  Vice Presidential Candidate: Adolfo Jose EVERTZ Velez

-- Communist Party of Nicaragua (PCDEN)
  Presidential Candidate: Allan ZAMBRANA Salmeron
  Vice Presidential Candidate: Manuel PEREZ Estrada

-- Popular Action Movement--Marxist/Leninist
  Presidential Candidate: Isidoro TELLEZ Toruno
  Vice Presidential Candidate: Juan Alberto ENRIQUEZ Oporta

-- Popular Social Christian Party (PPSC)
  Presidential Candidate: Mauricio DIAZ Davila
  Vice Presidential Candidate: Guillermo MEJIA Silva

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-- Independent Liberal Party (PLI)
Presidential Candidate: Virgilio GODOY Reyes
Vice Presidential Candidate: Constantino PEREIRA Bernheim
(PLI withdrew from the election on October 21.)

-- Democratic Conservative Party (PCD)
Presidential Candidate: Clemente GUIDO
Vice Presidential Candidate: Merceditas Rodriguez de CHAMORRO

Parties not Registered:

-- Social Christian Party (PSC)
-- Social Democratic Party (PSD)
-- Liberal Constitutionalist Party (PLC)
-- Nicaraguan Conservative Party (PCN)

Campaign Period: The official campaign lasts three months, August 1-Oct. 31. During this period, parties are allowed by law to organize and proselytize, to hold rallies, and to distribute propaganda. The participating parties are permitted to share 30 minutes per day of airtime over the state-controlled television system and 45 minutes per day of airtime over state-controlled radio stations. Parties can, within limits, purchase air time on independent radio stations.

Financing: The state provides up to 9 million cordobas (roughly $320,000 at the 28:1 parallel market rate) to participating parties. Of this sum, 2.75 million cordobas is disbursed for the presidential race, and 75,000 cordobas is allocated for each of up to 90 National Assembly candidates, up to a total of 6.75 million cordobas.

Date of Transition: The government elected on November 4 will be inaugurated on January 10, 1985.

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